

# Some Pediform Artifacts as Footprints in Space and Time

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THE dwelling site of Đông-s'ôn, Thanh-hoá province, North Viet Nam, belonging to the first four centuries B.C. and the earlier part of the first century A.D., has yielded a certain number of shoe-shaped or pediform earthenware objects (Janse 1958) of the type illustrated in Figure 1 and Plate I, the significance of which has never been explained. Made of light reddish ware, rather heavy and well baked, the items vary in height from 0.075 m to 0.13 m. Some pieces, as illustrated in Plate I, are solid or present a shallow depression at the top. In other cases, the "shoes" are more hollow. These ceramics are reminiscent of an atrophied female foot or a hoof.

A great many shoe-shaped bronzes, referred to as axes, have been found at Đông-s'ôn and in different places in Viet Nam and Yunnan (Janse 1931). At least some of these axes, because of their small size and brittle quality, are to be regarded as ceremonial or exclusively for funerary use. Whether these pediform bronzes are related to the ceramic shoes is an open question.

Đông-s'ôn is the only locality in Southeast Asia or in the Far East where such ceramics have been found. Like the "spittoons," *situlae*, and drums excavated at Đông-s'ôn, they do not occur among deposits in vaulted brick tombs dated to Later Han or Six Dynasties periods, and consequently may be considered specifically characteristic of the Đông-s'ôn civilization (cf. Janse 1947, 1951).

As we know very little about the circumstances under which these shoe- or foot-shaped objects have been found, they have lost to some extent their documentary value. However, in 1935 we discovered in an "Indonesian" tomb one such specimen (Plate II, upper left); cf. Janse 1958: 43, pl. 20. Even though the rather rich funerary deposit was cluttered together, the tomb had not been looted.

The deposit, comprising mainly bronzes typical of the Đông-s'ôn industry, belonged to one of the first centuries B.C. It is noteworthy that there was among the findings a metallic omphalos bowl (Janse 1935: pls. 33, 34). However, it was in a position which seems to indicate that it had been placed *on*, not *in*, the tomb.

In China, as elsewhere in Eurasia (Azarpay 1965), we find many instances of superstitions related to shoes in connection with funerary and other customs. Thus, the *Bulletin of Folklore* (12:71) states that the Chinese used to give one single shoe to a deceased person and keep the other one in the belief that the departed person would return to the old home. On the other hand, as de Groot (1892) has pointed out, it was also customary to give a pair of shoes to the departed.

Until recent times in the Philippines shoes have played a part in the desire to see the deceased on his feet again. Thus, in the funerary cortège of the late President E. Quirino in 1956, boots which had belonged to him were turned *backward* in the stirrups of his riding horse.

The *Revue des traditions populaire* (1892; 7:579, 604) indicates that it was customary in the northern part of Viet Nam to place a pair of shoes at the entrance of a house where a person was believed to be suffering from typhus, and that in the central part of the country, the corpse was provided with a pair of sandals.

Votive paper shoes are used in connection with performances of mediums in Viet Nam (Durand 1959). M. Durand supplies the following interesting aside (p. 53):

Très souvent les fidèles offrent des objets votifs à telle ou telle divinité pour la remercier d'avoir exaucé leurs demandes.

Une pratique qui découle de celle-ci est que d'emporter chez soi un objet consacré à une déesse (soulier . . .) et l'y adorer porte bonheur. Autrefois, en Chine, pour obtenir des enfants les femmes essayaient de se faire prêter des souliers d'offrande censés avoir été portés par la Déesse donneuse d'enfants. Elles les emportaient chez elles et les plaçaient à côté de l'image ou de la tablette de la Déesse et la les souliers recevaient leur part des dévotions faites à la divinité. Si un enfant leur naissait, elles devaient apporter au temple, en signe de gratitude, une paire de souliers fabriqués sur le modèle de ceux qu'elles avaient empruntés et qui leur avaient porté bonheur. Parfois même, elles demandaient plusieurs paires de souliers, chacune à un temple différent, et les emportaient chez elles. Si elles venaient à avoir un enfant, c'était la déesse du temple ou elles étaient allées en dernier lieu qui recevait le plus d'offrandes en remerciement.

Sheets of paper reproducing various items, among them shoes, were sometimes buried with the dead in the region of Nha-Trang (Malleret 1960).

The reverence for clay feet or legs in Viet Nam is still evidenced by the fact that such objects, used as supports for a cauldron, are not discarded and thrown away when broken. In such cases they are ceremoniously buried or deposited for votive purposes at the roots of a sacred tree (Plate III). Such clay feet are referred to as "Sir Foot," and the trio of supports is said to contain white-, blue-, and red-faced spirits, one in each leg. Among the materials excavated by Malleret (1960) is a clay object with a shallow depression at one end and four feet at the other. Identified by Malleret as an oven support, this piece—and perhaps the Đông-s'ôn pediform earthenware as well—may indicate the antiquity of Vietnamese veneration of kitchen equipment. Clay objects of the same shape as those in Figs. 1 and 2, but approximately .3 m or more in height, are made in villages in the area of Cao Be in South Viet Nam. Used only on special occasions to contain small paddy husk fires for warming tea, these objects inspire paper imitations in all sizes on certain

holidays. A play concerning one of these small ovens personified is still included in the repertoire of the Hat Boi, Vietnamese classical opera.

Farther to the West, as Azarpay has pointed out in connection with his study of two Urartian boot vessels, boot-shaped ceramics (Plate IV) of the 9th or 10th century B.C. have been found on the right bank of the Kura River in Azerbaijan (Azarpay 1965:63, 64, figs. 5, 6). Tucci (1963) comments on white in the design.

Aslanov's work (1959:pl. 36) reproduces a number of such boot-shaped vessels that were discovered in the same region. Azarpay (1965:64) refers to discoveries from the Kyzyl-Vank monastery, and for comparative material see Mongait's (1959:250 ff.) discussion of others. Transcaucasian finds pointed out by Azarpays and others are of particular interest in the light of proposed connections between Đông-s'ôn culture and 9th-11th century B.C. European migrations. For additional data see Janse (1931) and Heine-Geldern's important study (1951). Several ceramic imitations of shoes have been found in Iran (Plates V, VI), some of which possibly belong to the 9th-8th centuries B.C. For examples from Ziwiye and Hasanlu see the discussion by Azarpay (1965:62, 63; figs. 3, 4). Unfortunately, we do not know the circumstances under which these items have been found.

In the Old Testament are found references to shoes used in various legal transactions. To place one's foot on something or to throw a sandal on a piece of land was regarded as taking possession of it (Psalms 60:8), and the sandal was also used as a symbol of ownership (Ruth 4:7; Deut. 25:9-10) (Spicer 1940:15 ff.; Azarpay 1965).

A great many clay feet or clay shoes have been found in Greece, made for both votive and funerary purposes (Plate VII) (Poulsen 1904:56, 61; Azarpay 1965). Votive bronze feet with sandals have been discovered in Italy (Plates VIII, IX).

Oscar Almgren (1927), in his stimulating work on Swedish rock carvings and magic rites, has discussed at some length many groups of footprints (partly symbols of shoes) from the bronze age (second millennium B.C.) carved on rocks, especially in central Sweden. According to the author, these rock carvings were, at least to some extent, connected with the cults of the dead and also possibly related to fertility rites.

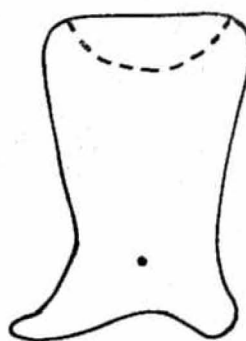
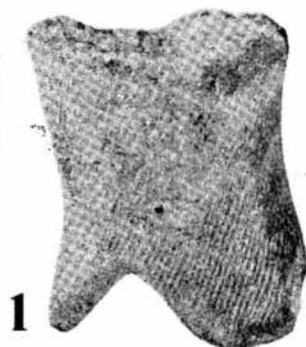
Though it is still difficult to determine the possible relationship between the clay shoes from Đông-s'ôn and the use of similar objects found elsewhere in Eurasia, we may assume that they are all to be regarded as expressions of common beliefs and customs which go back into primitive times, and that some of the customs have survived with an almost incredible tenacity in one form or another to the present day. Pending further discoveries and investigations, we shall have to leave open the real meaning of the Dongsonian clay feet.

Shoe-shaped ceramic vessels have been found also in Central and South America (Plate X). In addition to the Guatemalan example, the Peabody Museum of Harvard University has a foot-shaped vessel (No. 46.77.30/5108) from Paramonga, on the coast of Peru (Plate XI). Whether these items can be looked upon as an expression of the same concepts as those connected with ceramic shoe imitations in Eurasia is, in our present state of knowledge, pure speculation. However, as evidence has been presented in recent years of contact between Southeast Asia and China, on the one hand, and Central and South America, on the other, there is a possibility that the similarities are not purely coincidental (Janse 1962*a, b*; Meggers, Evans, and Estrada 1965; Carter 1957).

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Plate I →  
Shoe-shaped ceramic.  
Dông-s'on. Cf. Janse,  
*Archaeological Research  
in Indo-China*, III,  
fig. 34.



← Fig. 1  
Shoe-shaped ceramic.  
Dông-s'on. Cf. Janse,  
*Archaeological Research  
in Indo-China*, III,  
fig. 35.



← Plate II  
A clay-shaped boat *in  
situ*, a funerary deposit  
at Dông-s'on. Cf. Janse,  
*Archaeological Research  
in Indo-China*, III,  
pl. 20, a, b.

Plate III Deposit of legs (supports) for cooking  
vessels at a sacred tree. Quang-ngai province,  
South Viet Nam. Offerings and tree are taboo.  
Photo: O. Janse, 1937. ↓



Plate IV Boot-shaped clay vessel from  
Mingechaur, Azerbaijan SSR; 10th-9th centuries  
B.C. Decorations inlaid with white paste. After  
A. L. Mongait, *Archaeology in the U.S.S.R.*,  
p. 250. ↓



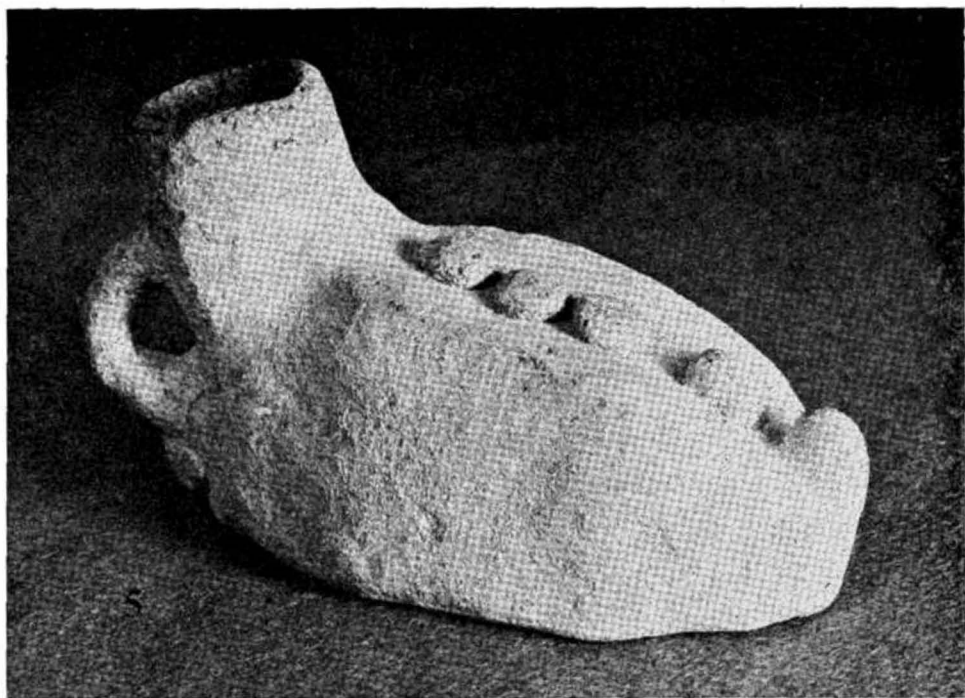


Plate V Ceramic vessel in shape of shoe. Hurvin, Iran. 9th–8th centuries B.C.  
Length, 0.105 m. Private collection.

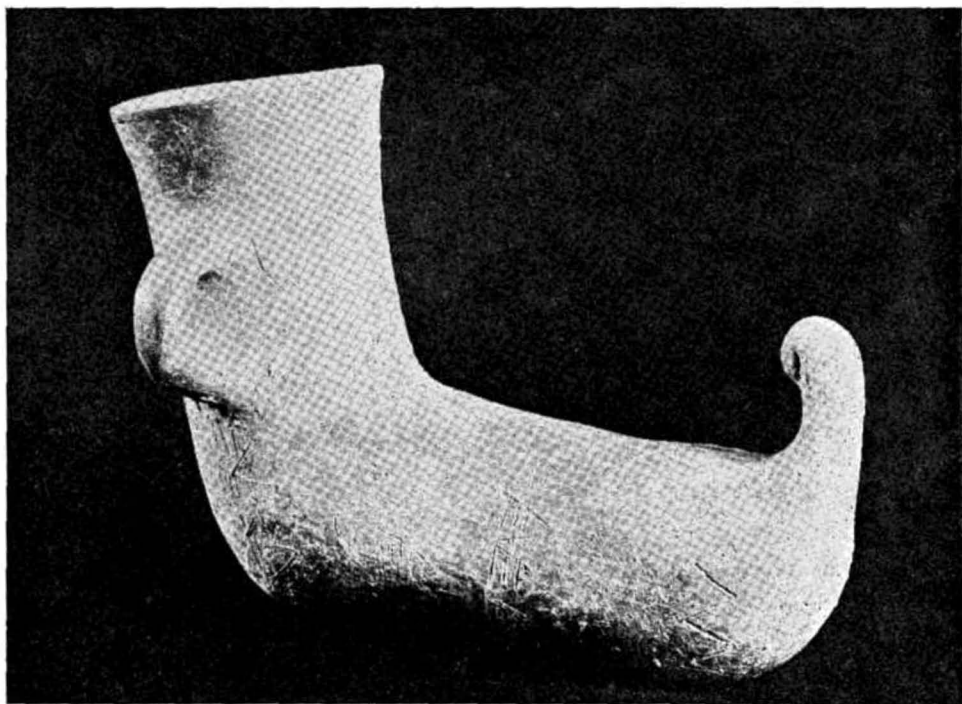


Plate VI Ceramic vessel in shape of shoe. Amlash, Iran. 9th–8th centuries B.C. Incised decor, imitating embroidery and laces. Length, 0.170 m.; height, 0.115 m. Forongi Collection, Teheran.

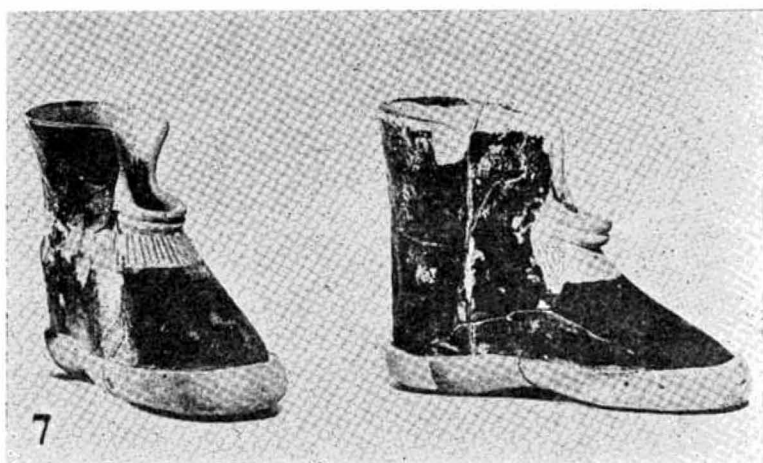


Plate VII Terra-cotta boots from a tomb (ca. 900 B.C.). Agora, Athens.



Plate VIII A pair of votive bronze feet with sandals. Italy. Provenance unknown. Courtesy, Musée du Louvre.



Plate IX  
Shoe lamp, Rome.  
Courtesy, Musée  
du Louvre.

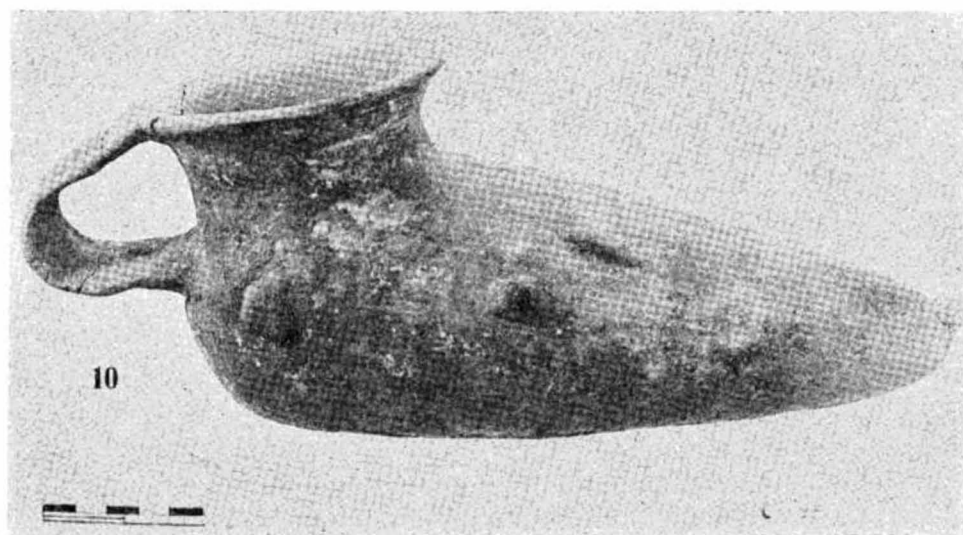


Plate X Shoe-shaped vessel. Ruins of Quiché, Guatemala. Courtesy, Peabody Museum, Harvard University (97.44.20/C-1931).



Plate XI Pottery shaped shoe, circumstances of find unknown, from West Coast Indians. Courtesy, Peabody Museum, Harvard University (46.77.30/5108).